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ABSTRACT

Periodic polls conducted since 1916 sampling the opinions of students, parents, and teachers on the subject of homework have revealed little change in attitudes. Subjects of the polls ranged from early elementary grades to seniors in high school. While results were not always consistent from study to study, it was generally agreed that as a student progressed from elementary school to high school, the amount of homework assigned increased significantly. In addition, several studies have indicated that the amount of student time spent working on homework assignments has increased markedly during the last 30 years. The most recent study (1977) indicated that high school mathematics teachers felt that when compared to previous students their current students did not discipline themselves to study and to do their homework. Administrators stated that homework for students at the fourth-grade level and above was warranted. While students did not favor homework, they felt that it helped them to achieve better grades. Parents strongly favored homework. (JD)

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THE RESULTS OF SURVEYS, QUESTIONNAIRES,
AND POLLS REGARDING HOMEWORK

In one of the earliest empirical studies, Brooks (1916) visited the homes of 268 students in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades of a city school system. He gathered data on the type of home, school grades, amount of homework, and amount of assistance. Just as have more recent studies, Brooks found that children with disinterested parents in poor home environments tend to have difficulty with their schoolwork, and that when the parents are capable of guiding the child, the child generally does well.

In another early study Smith (1934) sent a questionnaire to the principals, teachers, pupils, and parents in six school districts in western Pennsylvania to obtain information on homework practices in the elementary grades. He analyzed the homework methods being used at that time, the various types of homework and the amount of homework assigned students. Smith found that teachers and principals believed homework desirable for students above the fourth grade. His data showed that parents favored homework, while children thought of homework as being undesirable.

The assignments of 1000 high school teachers were analyzed by Brink (1934). He found that over 90 percent of the assignments were teacher dominated. A study of student attitudes toward homework assignments reported by Doll (1947) indicated that most students preferred assignments resulting from joint planning by both the teacher and the students.

Brimm (1954) reported the results of a study conducted by the Teachers College High School faculty at Iowa State Teachers College. Questionnaires were sent to school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Published homework research was surveyed and the opinions of prominent educators relative to homework were studied. They concluded that there was little agreement on the subject.

Schiller (1954) administered a questionnaire to 117 junior high school students in order to determine the students' reactions to homework. Mathematics was indicated as the subject in which homework was most beneficial. The students were asked about ways to make homework more useful and relevant. They suggested: (1) homework assignments should be shorter, (2) homework assignments should be more interesting and worthwhile, (3) homework assignments should be thoroughly explained when assigned, and (4) homework assignments should not be used as busy work.

The purpose of a study conducted by Modlin (1959) was to determine what parents and teachers in Davidson County, Tennessee, were doing and thinking about assigned homework in grades four, five, and six. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. She found that: (1) approximately 30 percent of the teachers assigned homework on a daily basis, (2) approximately 53 percent of the teachers checked and returned homework at intervals, (3) 48 percent of the teachers regarded homework as very beneficial, (4) 58 percent of the parents reported helping their children sometimes, while 22 percent helped them daily, and (5) 60 percent of the parents helped their children solve problems while 59 percent checked answers. Most parents felt that thirty minutes per

subject, per day, should be sufficient for their child. Parents who approved of homework felt that it improved grades, stimulated interest, and helped children develop a sense of responsibility. Those parents who did not approve of homework felt that it was a waste of time, frustrating, and encouraged the student to be deceitful and resentful.

Gallup and Hill (1960) conducted a comparative study between selected schools in England, France, Norway, West Germany, and the United States. The results showed the American child to be last in the total combined time spent in school and doing homework. The American secondary student spent 16 percent less time in the classroom and 64 percent less time on homework than his West German counterpart. In comparison to the French student, the American fourteen-year-old spent 13 percent less time in the classroom and 58 percent less time on homework. To improve the quality of American education, Gallup and Hill suggested that American schools lengthen their school year and increase the amount of homework required.

The results of a teacher opinion poll conducted by the National Education Association (1961) revealed that 83.5 percent of all elementary teachers surveyed favored the use of homework in the teaching of elementary school students. Their findings indicated that a substantial portion of the elementary school student's day is commonly devoted to the preparation of homework assignments. The teachers favoring homework indicated that pupils in grades one through three would have two and one-half hours of homework per week and pupils in grades four through six should have four hours per week.

Two years later Langdon and Stout (1963) reported the feelings of parents about homework. Three hundred parents, representing all levels of educational backgrounds and occupations, constituted their sample. The parents felt that homework: (1) developed self-discipline, (2) enriched the experiences of the school day, (3) provided opportunities for independent study, and (4) helped to draw the home and school together. The parents preferred homework that: (1) could be successfully completed in a reasonable time period, (2) could be understood by the students, and (3) would keep the students interested in learning.

Hudson (1965) investigated the attitudes of sixth, eighth, and eleventh grade students, their parents, and teachers toward homework and its various facets. The study was conducted in the Fayetteville, Arkansas school system. He found that: (1) girls spent more time in study at home than did boys, (2) both boys and girls spent less time studying each night than they believed to be appropriate, (3) boys were reminded by their parents more often than girls to do their homework, (4) students, parents, and teachers felt that time spent in completing homework assignments should increase as a student progressed through school, and (5) copying of homework increased as students advanced to a higher level, with girls more likely than boys to copy and to permit copying. Sixth grade students and teachers from all levels felt that an independent project was a type of assignment which promoted learning. However, eighth and eleventh grade students viewed assignments from the textbook and teacher-directed problems and study questions as more beneficial. Parents felt that homework was of value in that it

served as a preparation for further studies. On the other hand, teachers felt that homework had greatest value as a self-disciplining measure and as a means to develop responsibility. The students felt that homework could be improved if teachers would explain the assignment more thoroughly at the time it was assigned and then return the checked homework with comments on what was wrong and suggestions for improvement. Parents also believed more instruction in how to study and a system of assigning different subjects on different nights would increase the homework efforts of students.

Bond and Smith (1964) surveyed 77 school districts in the state of New York to determine their homework practices. They found that 90 percent of those schools surveyed had formal homework beginning by the fourth grade or earlier. Students in grade six were expected to complete an average of fifty minutes of homework daily, while those in the lower grades had proportionally less homework assigned.

Kerzig (1966) reported the results of a homework questionnaire given to 748 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. About 70 percent of the students felt that homework helped them achieve better grades in mathematics. The three most commonly listed reasons hindering the students from working on their homework were: (1) an uninteresting assignment, (2) interruptions at home, and (3) television. The students indicated they would like to have: (1) a clear understanding of the assignment, (2) the materials necessary to do the assignment, and (3) a quiet place to study.

Savage (1967) conducted a study in which he had superintendents, elementary principals, elementary students and teachers, and the students'

parents in eighty New England school systems respond to a homework questionnaire. The elementary students were fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. A total of 4,414 questionnaires were returned and constituted the sample for his study. He found that homework was held in high favor in New England. Homework was assigned in over three-fourths of the region's school systems and favored by over 85 percent of all groups responding. However, few systems had a definitely stated homework policy. Of all the groups surveyed, homework was most valued by principals and least valued by parents, although 86.5 percent of the parents surveyed favored the practice. The largest percentage of educators favored homework assignments involving a combination of regular nightly written assignments, regular nightly reading assignments, and long-range projects. Most parents favored regular nightly reading assignments, but the majority of children highly valued assignments involving only regular nightly written homework. Most adults viewed homework as valuable in helping children develop initiative and responsibility, whereas most children saw its value in helping them to do better on exams. Those individuals who did not favor homework felt that the school day was long enough and that time spent in completing assignments could be more profitably spent on leisure activities. The parents were the most demanding of the five groups in terms of time which they thought should be devoted nightly to homework. Social studies was viewed by educators as the most valuable subject for assignments, while parents and children considered arithmetic to be the most valuable curriculum area. Educators favored student participation in planning the homework assignment, while parents and students preferred the teacher as the sole planner.

Leidy and Starry (1967) report a marked increase in the amount of time spent by students working on homework between 1948 and 1967. In 1948, seven percent of their national sample reported spending two or more hours daily doing homework. Comparable figures for 1962 and 1967 were 16 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

West and Wood (1970) administered a brief questionnaire to 331 public school students enrolled in grades 5-12 in nine schools. Forty-one percent of the students reported spending one hour or less outside school doing school assignments. Twenty-two percent indicated that they spent between one and two hours, while 37 percent spent two or more hours on school assignments.

West and Wood performed the chi-square test of independence between the reported amount of time spent on homework and responses to several other questions relating to felt pressure of school. Their results, significant at the .01 level, revealed that the students who reported spending greater amounts of time doing homework are more likely to: (1) report having dropped an activity or hobby, (2) report feeling a great deal of pressure, and (3) worry about exams.

The purpose of a study conducted by Scaglione (1975) was twofold. He sought to determine (a) the amount of homework assigned to sophomore and senior high school students in White Plains, New York, during a typical day, and (b) the reactions and expectations of parents, teachers, and students relative to those assignments. Scaglione's sample included 159 parents, 54 teachers, 505 sophomores, and 408 seniors. The Chi-square test of independence was used to analyze his data.

Scaglione reported significant differences in (1) the amount of time English and mathematics teachers thought that it took to complete assignments and the amount of time students actually worked on them, and (2) the amount of time spent on homework between college-bound and non-college bound students, sophomores and seniors, and girls and boys. It should be noted that the college-bound students, sophomores, and girls spent more time on homework than their counterparts. There were no significant differences in the amount of time that homework was worked on in school.

Maffei (1977) conducted a national survey of public high school mathematics teachers. He sought to determine teacher perceptions regarding the mathematics achievement of high school students. Seventy-nine percent of the sampled teachers believed that there had been a recent decline in the mathematics achievement of high school students. Several important causes for the decline were cited. The issue of homework was included as one of the reasons. The teachers felt that mathematics students were less likely to discipline themselves to study and to do their homework.

SUMMARY

The opinions of administrators, teachers, parents, and students regarding homework were solicited on numerous occasions. The results were not always consistent from study to study. However, it was generally agreed that as a student progressed from elementary school to high school, the amount of homework assigned increased significantly. In addition, several studies have indicated that the amount of student

time spent working homework assignments has increased markedly during the last thirty years. The most recent study cited indicated that high school mathematics teachers felt that when compared to previous students their current students did not discipline themselves to study and to do their homework.

Administrators stated that homework for students at the fourth grade level and above was warranted. While few schools had definitely stated homework policies, a great majority of the teachers assigned homework. The amount of time teachers thought it took to complete an assignment and the amount of time students actually worked on it was shown to be quite different. Students did not necessarily favor homework, but at the same time they felt that it helped them achieve better grades. Parents strongly favored homework for a variety of reasons. They felt that homework (1) improved grades, (2) stimulated interest, (3) helped develop initiative, responsibility and self-discipline, (4) provided opportunity for independent study, (5) drew the home and school closer, and (6) provided preparation for further study.

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